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# THE BLESSING OF ISAAC, GEN. XXVII.—A STUDY IN PENTATEUCHAL ANALYSIS.

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Since the analysis of Wellhausen in *Jahrbuch f. Deutsche Theologie*, XXI., 1876, some of the more important elements in this problem, the separation of the two strands J and E of the prophetic narrative, may be considered determined. It is certain that both J and E related almost identically the same story of usurpation on Jacob's part (cf. Gen. xxxii. 3 sqq. in J, and xxxv. 1 in E) and that the two accounts are closely interwoven in chapter xxvii. J's story certainly turned upon the deception of Isaac through the smell of Esau's garments which Rebekah had put upon Jacob (cf. v. 15 with vs. 24-27), and E's upon a much more improbable deception of the blind father by the sense of touch, the goat's hair covering of neck and hands suggesting to Isaac the hairy arms and neck of Esau (cf. vs. 11-14, 16, with 21-23). A few other doublets (30a = 30b, 44 = 45a), some few allusions to already determined portions of J or E (cf v. 29b with xii. 3; Num. xxiv. 9, and v. 36 with xxv. 29 sqq), with a few linguistic marks (יהוה vs. 7, 20, 27, אלהים, v. 28, E's formula of address vs. 1, 18,—cf. xxii. 1, 7, 11; xxxi. 11, etc.—“his eyes were dim so that he could not see”—cf. xlviii. 10; Deut. xxxiv. 7 and contrast 1 Sam. iv. 15, 1 Kgs. xiv. 4, אך vs. 13 and 30, and others less important) are all the *prima facie* clews afforded by this singularly difficult chapter.

For the purpose, however, of an approximate analysis we may rely with a fair degree of confidence upon the recurrence of certain characteristic phrases such as every writer is prone to repeat. When a certain reiterated idea is expressed by the same formula again and again in one series of sentences and in a second parallel series a somewhat different formula is employed, the *prima facie* evidence of unity of authorship in each series is tolerably strong, even when no shade of difference in the conception is discernible. Such recurrent phrases meet us in ch. xxvii. In vs. 19, 25, and 31 the collocation of the words, “venison, that  $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{thy} \\ \text{my} \end{array} \right\}$  soul may bless  $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{me} \\ \text{thee} \end{array} \right\}$ ” is quite striking.

The same phrase meets us also in vs. 3, 4, but broken in two by one of similar import but different form of expression: “Make me savoury meat such as I love, and bring it to me, that I may eat and bless thee before my death.” This second, longer phrase reappears as regularly as the first. It is quoted somewhat more briefly in v. 7, with the brief interruption “before Yahweh,” as what Rebekah

heard said before (v. 4). In v. 10 she again repeats it exactly, uninterrupted and complete. Part appears again in v. 14, and part in vs. 17 and 31.

Now, although the conception of both writers is doubtless as nearly as possible identical, xxv. 28 (J), which specifies "venison" as the occasion of Isaac's preference for Esau, suggests strongly that J is to be regarded as the user of the phrase "Bring me venison that my soul may bless thee," and this hypothesis agrees with the other phenomena of the text. The converse holds true of the longer phrase and the E passages. I venture, therefore, to connect together the fragments in vs. 3, 4, and 7, as follows: "Go out to the field and take me venison," "that my soul may bless thee," "before Yahweh;" and to complete E in v. 4 by inserting, as vs. 7 and 10 require, "and bless thee" in place of, "that my soul may bless thee."

Another recurrent phrase is the thrice repeated **שמע בקולי** as a form of address, "and now, my son, obey my voice," fullest in v. 8 but occurring also in vs. (3?) 13 and 43. No exactly equivalent example is found except Ex. xviii. 19, an indisputable E passage, and hence a certain degree of probability is given for assigning these verses to E. Here again we find ourselves in harmony with all other clues.

The first half of the chapter, vs. 1-27, may therefore be divided with some degree of confidence as follows. J = v. 1 to **מראה**, v. 3 except **ויעתה**, the words **בעבור תברכך נפשי** in v. 4 + the words **לפני יהוה** from v. 7, 5b, 6, **הביאה לי ציד** in v. 7, v. 15, 18, from **מי אתה בני** (cf. v. 32), 19, 20, 24-27. The remaining portions constitute E's narrative.

According to this analysis the two accounts will be read as follows:

#### J.

1a. And it came to pass, when Isaac was old, that his eyes were dim so that he could not see. [And he called Esau and said,] 3. Take, I pray thee, thy weapons, thy quiver and thy bow, and go out to the field and take me venison, 4, that my soul may bless thee before Yahweh. 5. And Esau went to the field to hunt for venison and to bring it. 6. And Rebekah spake unto Jacob her son, saying, Behold I heard thy father speak unto Esau thy brother, saying, 7. Bring me venison. . . . 15. And Rebekah took the goodly raiment of Esau her eldest son, which were with her in the house and put them upon Jacob her younger son, [and gave him the flesh of the kids which she had prepared and he came unto his father. And Isaac said] 18b. Who art thou my son? 19. And Jacob said to his father, I am Esau, thy firstborn; I have done according as thou badest me: arise, I pray thee, sit and eat of my venison, that thy soul may bless me. 20. And Isaac said unto his son, How is it that thou hast found it so quickly, my son? And he said, Because Yahweh thy God sent me good speed. 24. And he said, Art thou my very son Esau? And he said, I am. 25. And he

said, Bring it near to me and I will eat of my son's venison, that my soul may bless thee. And he brought it near to him, and he did eat: and he brought him wine and he drank. 26. And his father Isaac said unto him, Come near now, and kiss me, my son. 27. And he came near and kissed him: and he smelled the smell of his raiment, and blessed him, and said, See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which Yahweh hath blessed."

## E.

"1b. And [Isaac] called Esau his elder son and said unto him, My son; and he said unto him, Here am I. 2. And he said, Behold now I am old, I know not the day of my death. 3. Now therefore...and make me savoury meat, such as I love, and bring it to me that I may eat [and bless thee] before I die. 5. And Rebekah heard when Isaac spake to Esau his son [and she said unto Jacob, Behold thy father hath commanded Esau saying], 7. Make me savoury meat that I may eat and bless thee before my death. 8. Now therefore, my son, obey my voice according to that which I command thee. 9. Go now to the flock, and fetch me from thence two good kids of the goats: and I will make them savoury meat for thy father such as he loveth: and thou shalt bring it to thy father, that he may eat, so that he may bless thee before his death. 11. And Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, Behold, Esau my brother is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man. 12. My father peradventure will feel me, and I shall seem to him as a deceiver; and I shall bring a curse upon me, and not a blessing. 13. And his mother said unto him, Upon me be thy curse, my son; only obey my voice, and go and fetch them. 14. And he went and fetched, and brought them to his mother: and his mother made savoury meat such as his father loved. 16. And she put the skins of the kids of the goats upon his hands, and upon the smooth of his neck: 17. and she gave the savoury meat and the bread which she had prepared into the hand of her son Jacob. 18. And he came to his father and said, My father: and he said, Here am I... 21. And Isaac said unto Jacob, Come near, I pray thee, that I may feel thee, my son, whether thou be my very son Esau or not. 22. And Jacob drew near unto Isaac his father; and he felt him, and said, The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau. 23. And he discerned him not, because his hands were hairy as his brother Esau's hands: so he blessed him."

It is in the latter half of the chapter that we meet the real puzzle, and here the most trustworthy key is certainly the antistrophe, vs. 39 and 40.

Here, where there is no trace of more than one hand (cf. vs. 27-28, יְהוָה and אֱלֹהִים), if anywhere, we shall best be able to make out the metrical form, if such there was, in the poem of the blessing of Isaac which underlies and is quoted in the present narrative. So long however as it can still be considered a question whether Hebrew poetry possessed a metrical form, conjectures in this field must

of course be open to the freest criticism and can be offered only with the greatest diffidence. Still vs. 39, 40 stand in an unmistakable relation of contrast to vs. 28, 29, and offer such an inviting appearance of regularity that one can scarcely resist the impression of strophe and antistrophe to which the sense so admirably lends itself. If so, the later verses must give the metrical norm, for the reason above stated. Without alteration of the text or violence to sense or parallelism the verses resolve themselves into an antistrophe consisting of two pairs of alternate pentameter and trimeter lines, the former divided by caesura after the third foot, and the strophe itself concluded by a line of four feet without caesura, or pentameter catalectic. Thus divided the verse reads as follows :

הנה משמני הארץ || יהיה מושבך  
ומטל השמים מעל  
ועל חרבך תחיה || ואת-אחיך תעבר  
והיה כאשר תריד  
ופרכת עלו מעל צווארך

or, reproducing the meter and cadence in the translation,

Far from the fatness of earth || henceforth be thy dwelling  
Far from the dews of the heavens.  
Subsistence thou'lt gain by thy sword, || subject still to thy brother ;  
But struggling at length to be free,  
Shalt ever shake off his yoke from thy shoulder.

Applying this antistrophe to the lines of verses 27–29, the greater length of the latter confirms at once the judgment of analytical criticism that the two poetical stanzas are here combined in one. Unfortunately the meter in both portions (J and E) appears to be identical and hence gives no assistance in the separation. We have, however, other clews. The first two lines are assured to J by יהוה and by the connection with 27a. The last two lines also can scarcely be denied to the author of Gen. XII. 3, and the first two lines of v. 29 remind one strongly of the blessing of Abram as it appears in J.

On the other hand, האלהים establishes the derivation of the first two lines in v. 28 from E, and, as a necessary consequence, the first two lines of the antistrophe which depend upon them for significance. But the antistrophe is not separable, and involves with itself v. 37. This latter verse determines in its turn the source of the third line in v. 28 and the third and fourth lines of v. 29. The result is two strophes as follows :

J.

ראה ריח בני || כריח שדה  
 אשר ברכו יהוה  
 ישתחו לך לאמים || ועבדוך עמים  
 .....  
 ארריך ארור ומברכך ברוך

Possibly we should supply as the fourth line a phrase usually occurring in these blessings (cf. Gen. XII. 3) ונברכו בך כל-המשפחות. Translating as before, we should have the following strophe:

Is not the smell of my son || like the smell of a field  
 Which Yahweh hath watered with blessing?  
 Nations shall bow before thee || and peoples shall serve thee,  
 [For in thee all tribes shall be blest].  
 Blessing thee shall be blessing, and cursing thee curse.

In this case the order of the two portions of line three is inverted. But it may equally well be that וישתחו לך לאמים is in its proper position and the missing portion is the first part of line three.

The strophe of E seems also to be slightly deficient.

יתן לך האלהים || מטל השמים  
 ומשמני הארץ .....  
 ורב דגן ותירוש || .....  
 הוה גביר לאחריך  
 וישתחו לך בני אמך

The second and third lines appear incomplete. In the former the corresponding line of the antistrophe suggests מתחת as the missing word. In the latter case v. 37 supplies something like יסמך הארמה — We translate:

Abundance of dew from the heavens || thy God shall afford thee,  
 And the fatness of earth [from beneath.]  
 With plenty of corn and wine || [thy land shall sustain thee.]  
 A lord thou shalt be to thy brethren.  
 To thee shall bow down all the sons of thy mother.

The prose portion of the narrative, vs. 30–38, 41–45, according to the clews already employed offer the following analysis, J = 30a, etc., 31b–33, 36a, 41a, 45. E = 30b, 31a, 34sq., 36b–40, 41b–44. V. 46 is, of course, a part of the Priestly element though probably due to R. No certainty can attach to the details of the

above analysis, yet there can be no doubt of the main points, and it is satisfactory to be able to complete the parallel columns of J and E in even an approximate way.

If anything of our attempted analysis of the poetic portions survives the criticism of more experienced judges, it will be not only a matter of interest to bring to view so noble an example of strophe and antistrophe, employing such a variety of meter, but the recognition of two poetical fragments so closely allied and apparently identical in meter, underlying respectively J and E, will prove of importance to the problem of the origin and mutual relation of these two elements of the Prophetic Narrative. Other examples of a combination of nearly identical poetic fragments in JE are not wanting, as e. g., in the Song of Balaam. Cf. Num. xxiii. 21b-24 with Num. xxiv. 7b-9; the Song of Miriam, Ex. xv. 1 and 21. But these have been disputed, the resemblance of the passages being considered due to an interpolation, or accounted for otherwise than as part of the general parallelism of J and E. The possibility suggests itself that Gen. xlix. 22-26 is another instance of a fragment derived from E's poetical source corresponding to a similar source employed by J and followed by JE in the rest of the Blessing of Jacob. (Cf. **אל שדי** v. 25 with **יהוה** v. 18, and the failure in v. 22 alone to begin the strophe with the name of the tribe; notice also the strongly marked peculiarities of this part of the poem, and contrast the assigning of the hegemony of the tribes to Joseph with the similar tribute to Judah in vs. 2-10; finally compare the unity of the remaining portions, their apparent relation to the Song of Deborah and adaptation to the period not long after, with the seeming allusion to the Syrian wars in v. 23. There are, however, strong objections).

A recognition of this, as the true explanation of the resemblances in the poetic portions of J and E, makes the idea that these writers themselves compared the poetic portions of their narrative still more improbable if not totally out of the question. The dependent writer would certainly have made his work in these portions either far more similar or far less so.

Again all this carries back the divergences of J and E one step further than has heretofore been commonly assumed. They did not draw from a common (i. e. identical) fund of tradition and minstrelsy. Two versions of the folk-songs existed, perhaps even written versions, possibly the same often cited "Book of Jashar" (E) and "Book of the wars of Yahweh" (J), and to these differing collections, for which Renan has furnished us the analogy in his oft adduced *Khitab el Aghani*, might perhaps be referred many of the idiosyncrasies of our present J and E documents. Gen. xii. 2sq. looks like a prose rendering of some poetic blessing like that which ends with **אוריך אור ומברכך ברוך** in Gen. xxvii. 29 and with the same words reversed in order, Num. xxiv. 9. Such phenomena tend to confirm the theory that the Genesis narratives stand in the same relation to their poetic originals as Judg. iv. to Judg. v.